

## REPORT OF DISCOVERY TEAM LEADER

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### **SUBJECT: REVIEW AND EVALUATION OF THE YOUR PARK PROJECT (BIG LOTTERY FUNDED FROM JUNE 2012 TO MARCH 2016).**

#### Purpose of Report

To provide members with a review of the Your Park project following its completion in March of 2016 after more than three and half years of project delivery.

#### Introduction/Background

The Your Park (YP) project was funded through the Big Lottery Fund's People and Places funding stream, the project started in June of 2012 and was completed in March of 2016. The project was designed to complement and develop the existing social inclusion work of Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority (PCNPA), targeting local groups and organisations working with people amongst the most likely to face barriers in accessing a wide range of outdoor opportunities, but in particular within the National Park.

The Authority has for many years been able to provide high quality opportunities for disadvantaged groups locally, however activities are often delivered as a 'stand-alone' experiences, with limited consideration of how engagement with the outdoors might be sustained to benefit participants in the future.

Your Park sought to engage local groups and organisations in utilizing the outdoors as a place to achieve good outcomes for their clients and to build organisational capacity to sustain this activity independently, or with minimal support, in the long-term.

The project was staffed by a full-time project officer and part-time project assistant. Additional support was provided by Discovery and Area Rangers, together with technical and operational support from many other officers across the Authority. The project also benefited from the input of volunteers and the contributions of other organisations locally in enabling groups and individuals to take part in a range of activities in and around Pembrokeshire Coast National Park.

#### Comparisons

The project took as its starting point the National Park Authority's existing social inclusion work. Throughout the project the aim has been to develop stronger working relationships with inclusion groups with the aim of building their capacity to access the outdoors independently. Critical to this goal has been the need to evidence the value of outdoor activity in the National Park in terms of benefits to clients and service users. Consequently participative evaluation has been important in working with those taking part from more than 50 Pembrokeshire groups and organisations.

Your Park worked with a range of groups, organisations and agencies from the public, private and third sector and with participants from many distinct communities including adults with special needs, individuals on rehabilitation programmes and young people both within higher (post 16) education and excluded from formal (school age) learning. The diversity of audiences meant that the project's staff had to be flexible in their approach, using different communication tools, activities and settings to work with groups. Similarly the training and

support offered to staff and volunteers leading groups and managing organisations has been tailored to meet their requirements wherever possible.

Over the course of the project there have been no similar initiatives from other organisations in the heritage conservation sector. The project team were able to work alongside the National Trust, Wildlife Trust for South and West Wales and Pembrokeshire County Council to add value to their work and contribute volunteer conservation activity to sites managed by these organisations.

Amongst groups and organisations working with 'hard to reach' and disadvantaged audiences, some had previously taken part in inclusion work delivered on behalf of the Authority, but many had not taken up similar opportunities to work outdoors with their clients previously. Overall, the Your Park project was seen as innovative in its approach to engaging new audiences in outdoor activity, this view is reflected in the project's evaluation.

### Options

Over the course of the project more than 2,500 people took part in Your Park activity. The project delivered over 400 sessions involving around 50 different groups with at least 600 participants achieving their John Muir Discovery Award since the project started.

All activities were delivered with the aim of building the capacity of organisations and groups to increase their use of the outdoors in achieving their own outcomes. For example, Team Around the Family (TAF) worked with Your Park for around 2 years, the organisation's staff have received training to enable them to develop their own outdoor programmes for local families. TAF have gone on to provide full programmes of accessible outdoor activity for their clients and have designed their own bespoke John Muir Family Award for which they recently received their own Lottery funding. Participants rated their experience of outdoor sessions highly leading staff to explore more options for outdoor activity with families.

Elliot's Hill Care Ltd were one of the first organisations to get involved with the project. They have embedded outdoor activity as a key element of their work with clients with a range of special needs. Staff at all levels of the organisation have attended training, including senior managers. Their job descriptions for key workers now include reference to delivering outdoor activity as a requirement of the post.

The provision of training and support for groups and organisations was seen as an important tool if outdoor activity was going to be sustained beyond the lifetime of the funded project. A range of topics has been covered, from John Muir Award leader training and storytelling workshops to bushcraft/survival courses and walk leader training.

At the end of the project we have evidence to suggest that local groups and organisations do see the value of the outdoors as a setting/tool through which they can achieve good outcomes for their clients/service users. The following were amongst the benefits noted:

- Increased levels of physical activity
- Improved mental health
- Overall improvements to individual health and wellbeing
- Developing new skills
- Improved team work
- Improved social skills and communication skills. A greater willingness to socialise
- Greater confidence in being outdoors
- Knowledge and understanding relating to the National Park and/or specific aspects of heritage/biodiversity

Our evaluation shows that the training and support we have been able to offer is valued and is used by those involved to sustain outdoor activity and explore new areas/activities that

sometimes take them out of their comfort zone. The project has numerous examples of individuals that have been inspired by the outdoors and groups which have changed the way they work to spend more time outdoors with service users. However, the project also demonstrates that support is required in order to sustain these benefits, whether that be in the form of training, mentoring or facilitating communication between groups, organisations and individuals to provide mutual support.

Evaluation has also shown that there are barriers that can limit the opportunity provided by access to the outdoors for a particular group or organisation. These include availability of resources, the limitations of transport/public transport, the resistance of established practice, un-supportive managers/decision makers.

It remains to be seen whether the groups and organisations which took part in the Your Park project continue to make use of the outdoors as a focus for activity with their clients/service users in the medium to long-term. Based on the evaluation received from many of those that took part in the project it seems that many will require continued support at varying levels in order to continue to get the best out of the National Park for their clients. How much support is required will depend on a range of factors from funding and the associated management of conflicting priorities to the need for additional training and support (as a consequence of staff changes for example).

At present the National Park Authority is well placed to offer some support to these groups and organisations, particularly if the resources available within the ranger teams are directed towards this 'enabling' work as a priority.

#### Financial considerations

The project was fully funded by the Big Lottery funded. The project's completion means these funds are no longer available to the Authority to carry out this type of work. The project officer has reverted to a part-time Discovery Ranger role following the end of the project, part of this role will be to continue to engage with socially excluded groups in Pembrokeshire. A new bid to the Big Lottery Fund is being prepared by the Authority for submission later this spring.

#### Risk considerations

Project funding allowed the National Park Authority to resource focussed social inclusion work with many of the County's disadvantage communities. At the end of the funding period the most significant risk is likely to be associated with those that participated ceasing to engage with the outdoors/National Park in the future with the subsequent loss of benefit/diminished access for those that take part. However, it is possible that we can continue to provide ongoing support to some, albeit with a limited capacity.

It is possible that the project's end may diminish the NPA's status in terms of its social inclusion work amongst some working in this sector

#### Compliance

The Your Park project addressed both Park purpose and key policy drivers for the NPA. The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act sets out desired outcomes which have strong links to the work carried out through the Your Park project. Similarly Your Park has been able to contribute to public health outcomes through its work over the past three and a half years.

#### Human Rights/Equality issues

The project addressed key equality issues in terms of access to the natural heritage of Wales and contributed to the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority's own Equality Plan. The project also makes links between access to natural heritage and human rights.

### Biodiversity implications/Sustainability appraisal

The Your Park project had no negative impact on biodiversity in the National Park. Broadly speaking, project delivery resulted in increased awareness of biodiversity in Pembrokeshire (amongst new audiences) and involved participants in positive actions which support biodiversity.

### Welsh Language statement

The project provided a platform to engage with a range of groups and communities. However, the project did not target Welsh language speakers specifically with its services.

### Conclusion

The Your Park project sought to embed the benefits of outdoor activity in achieving a range of outcomes for socially excluded and disadvantaged people, and to develop a practical model for ensuring access to opportunities are sustained for a range of groups and organisations locally.

It aimed to achieve these goals by providing targeted experience of the National Park, bespoke training opportunities and ongoing support. Feedback from organisations engaged with the project suggests that it was at least partially in progressing these aims. A high proportion of group leaders and their clients have learnt how to operate outdoors, feeding this into operational change in their organisations and understanding more about the importance of the outdoors to health and well-being - all of which fit closely with messages from the Welsh Government and identified good practice.

### **Key Learning Points/Actions:**

#### **i) Participants**

- The benefits of outdoor activity to a range of individuals and groups should continue to be mapped and recorded as the project draws to a close

#### **ii) Group leaders**

- Requirements for ongoing support needs to be discussed with both staff and volunteers from participating organisations
- Specific training/skills development requirements should be identified in order to build this into ongoing support.

#### **iii) Decision makers**

- There will need to be recognition of the value of this type of work and appropriate ongoing support from senior staff if existing work is to be developed going forward

#### **iv) PCNPA staff**

- Consider how to link Your Park learning to the development of social inclusion work across the Authority
- Capture Your Park good practice and consider how to sustain the commitment of groups and organisations following the end of the project. For example an identified key person to keep contact and provide connections; accessible and up to date database/web pages.

### Recommendation

**For report only – no actions required.**

Background Documents

Evaluation report for the Your Park project – to follow

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